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ABSTRACT

This article, in Section 1, describes language learning as learner growth or development in three interrelated areas: personal awareness, awareness of learning processes and task awareness. These are the three angles of a triangle that constitute the notion of school learning as learner education. The second section discusses how to promote the learner's personal growth, and lists the kinds of questions teachers might use to review their educational thinking and classroom practices. Section 3 suggests that the learners' awareness of the learning task can be seen as a map of the task and recommends that the teacher pay attention to content and process when designing learning tasks. Section 4 discusses the possibilities and challenges of cooperative learning, and section 5 focuses on implications for evaluation, particularly portfolio assessment. The final section of the article looks at language learning as school development, with emphasis on the role of teaching language through content. (Contains 33 references.) (CK)

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TEACHING CONTENT THROUGH A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A MATTER OF SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

1. Language learning as learner growth

Language learning can be seen as learner development in three interrelated areas of knowledge, skills and awareness:

(1) **personal awareness**: self-concept, self-esteem and collaboration
(2) **awareness of learning processes**: control of the process
(3) **task awareness**: knowledge of the subject matter to be studied

These areas can be seen as the three angles of a triangle that constitutes the notion of school learning as learner education, as shown in Diagram 1.

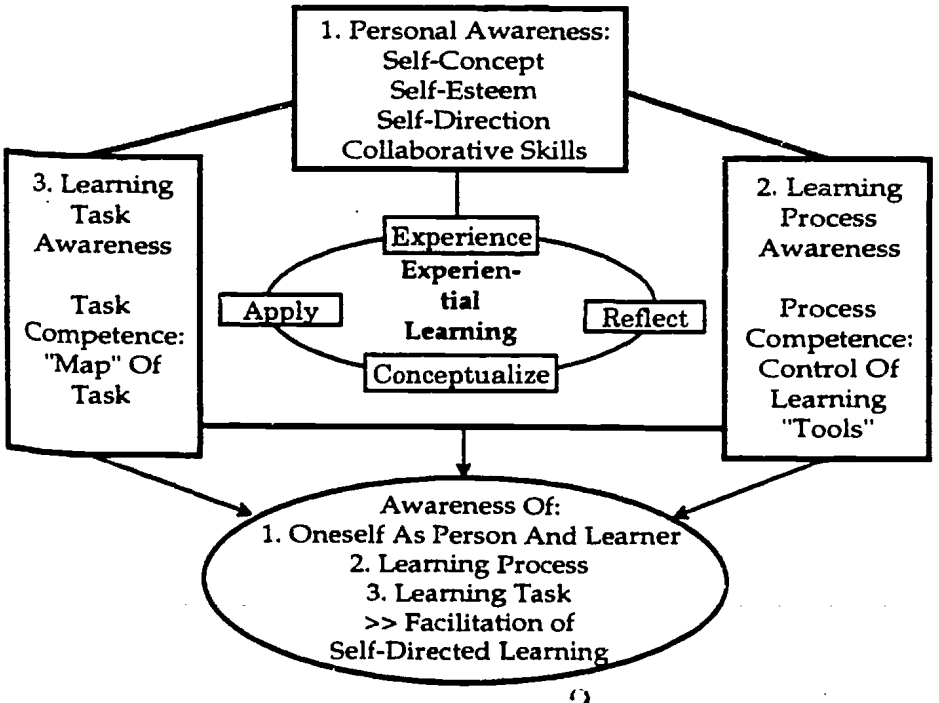

Diagram 1. School Learning as Learner Education.

Developing the learner's awareness on all of these aspects is suggested as a way of facilitating so that the learner may become a more competent person and a more competent learner. Such a learner can assume an increasing responsibility for his own learning and the learning of others in the social context. Learning along the lines suggested by experiential learning theory is proposed as a possible mode of learning within the triangle. The approach emphasizes the need to reconcile intuitive experiences of subject matter learning with various ways of conceptualizing them by reflective processes (cf. Kolb 1984; Kohonen 1987; 1991; 1992a,b; 1993; Kohonen, Folland and Taivalsaari 1993; Salmon 1988; Robertson 1988).

Clearly differentiated personal awareness, self-concept and self-esteem are necessary for the development of self-directed, autonomous learning. Autonomy is essentially a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action (Little 1991). Self-direction describes an attitude to learning, where the learner assumes increasing responsibility for the decisions concerning his learning but does not necessarily undertake the implementation of all of those decisions alone. There are various degrees of self-direction depending on the learner's attitude and ability to organize and manage his learning. There is thus a continuum between other-directed and self-directed learning involving a range of options between the extremes. To the extent that the learner is willing and able to undertake learning tasks without direct teacher (or learning material) control he displays various degrees of autonomy.

Autonomy thus includes the notion of interdependence, that is, being responsible for one's conduct in the social context. We need to be able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways, through negotiations and open, undominated discussions between equals. Autonomy entails a significant measure of independence from external control and thus a willingness and ability to make up one's mind about what is right or wrong. It is basically an ethical concept that is part of the individual's moral growth. Being an autonomous person means respecting one's dignity as a moral person and valuing others by treating them with dignity. As the well-known "Golden Rule" of ethics puts it, we have a duty to accord others the same kind of treatment we expect them to accord us. The development of autonomy is consequently a matter of both personal, social and moral education.

The learner's self-esteem and his view of himself as a person and language learner are important characteristics that correlate with successful foreign language learning. Language learning requires persistent efforts, an ability and courage to cope with the unknown, to tolerate ambiguity

and, in a sense, to appear childish and make a fool of oneself when making mistakes. A person who is ready to accept with tolerance and patience the frustrations of ambiguity is in a better position to cope with them than a learner who feels frustrated in ambiguous situations. Such tolerance is particularly necessary in the early stage of foreign language learning, which is bound to involve unpredictability and novelty because of the new linguistic system. New learnings and understandings are always potentially threatening. Confident persons have the advantage of not fearing unfamiliar situations or rejection as much as those with high anxiety levels, and are therefore more likely to take risks and try new and unpredictable experiences. This is particularly relevant in the contexts where the second language is used as the medium for learning increasingly demanding contents through the new language (Kohonen 1992a; 1993).

2. Awareness of oneself as a person and learner

In order to promote the learner's personal growth as an integral part of the pedagogical design for school learning, the teacher might consider the following kinds of questions to review his or her educational thinking and classroom practices (Kohonen 1992b):

- **responsibility:** to what extent do learners assume responsibility for their own learning? Are they willing to take action in order to learn?
- **ground rules:** are classroom rules established together and observed consistently?
- **learner support groups:** are learners encouraged to help and respect each other? Do they work together cooperatively?
- **focus on the positive:** is there a recognition of positive growth and strengths (rather than giving feedback on shortcomings and weaknesses)?
- **reflection on social learning:** to what extent are the collaborative skills of group participation discussed and taught explicitly?
- **"high expectations"**: are learners encouraged to stretch to higher levels of achievement? To what extent and how are learner initiative and risk-taking encouraged?
- **support:** to what extent do learners feel that they get support? Do they feel that they are listened to seriously?
- **personal strengths and resources:** to what extent does the teacher promote a belief in the capacity of each learner to learn and progress? Do learners set goals for both personal growth and cognitive development?
- **recognition and feedback:** do learners get recognition for good work? Do they receive information on the development of their competence? Is the information descriptive of the progress (rather than evaluative)?

- **perseverance:** are learners willing to persevere in their learning efforts? Do they get encouragement for this? How secure do they feel in the classroom?

These questions invite attention to the importance of intrinsic motivation in school learning. Learners are encouraged to see themselves as increasingly competent and self-determined, assuming an increasing degree of responsibility for their own learning. Intrinsic motivational factors are generally connected with the following properties:

- they satisfy needs at higher levels of needs hierarchies, such as belonging, acceptance, satisfaction from work, self-actualization, power and self-control
- they manifest themselves primarily in the form of feelings, e.g. feelings of success and competence
- they are connected with work, involving feelings of relevance of work, satisfaction derived from work, feelings of progress and achievement, and feelings of growth as a person.

By designing learning experiences that can promote such feelings it is possible, at least to some extent, to enhance the learner's feelings of self-direction (Kohonen 1992a,b).

3. Awareness of the learning task and processes

The learner's awareness of the learning task can be seen as a map of the task. To use a familiar analogy from orienteering, this knowledge can be compared with the topographic map of the terrain. To be able to use the map one has to possess a sufficient knowledge of the topographic symbols and be able to match the map with the surrounding terrain. Equipped with such a map, the necessary literacy and a compass, it is safe to explore and enjoy an unknown terrain and find one's way properly.

In learning a foreign language, it is helpful for the language learner to know the "terrain" of the second or foreign language: what elements there are, how they are interconnected and patterned, what combinations are possible and likely to occur, what are frequent, and what similarities and differences there are between his native language and the target language. Such information will create order out of the seemingly chaotic primary data that the learner has to confront when dealing with the new language. Order and structure, in turn, will create predictability and thereby facili-

tate the processing task as the learner can make heuristic guesses of the message form and content. An awareness of the task can function as a framework to which he can integrate new learnings and thus feel safer when confronting new language elements. He can feel that he masters, at least to some extent, the unknown terrain that he is entering (Kohonen 1992a,b).

Involvement of the learner in the task at hand is necessary for effective learning. Learning materials and tasks do not as such guarantee anything; an equally important question is what the learner does with them. It is important that the learner **does** something to the input so that the output becomes his own and has a personal meaning for him, no matter how modest such modifications or productions are in the beginning. An input which is not worked on by the learner has not much subjective meaning for him. It does not turn into a real output. It could be rather described as "throughput" - an output which is nothing but the unmodified input and does not touch the learner inside. A meaningful output is thus based on an input which is digested and somehow modified by the learner and thereby becomes his own. This is a matter of the quality of internal processing.

It is thus necessary to pay conscious pedagogical attention to the quality of both the learning tasks and the learning activities. Learning tasks can be designed so as to promote learner development in accordance with the desirable goal orientation. When designing the learning tasks, the teacher can pay attention to two things at the same time (Kohonen 1992b):

- **content**: what kinds of material the learner works with, and
- **process**: how he is guided to work on it

In doing so, he or she may find the following kinds of questions helpful:

- **aims and tasks:** who sets the aims, chooses the tasks and decides on the contents and modes of working on them? How relevant and interesting tasks do learners have?
- **monitoring:** to what extent can learners design their own tasks and suggest ways of evaluating their performance?
- **involvement:** how actively are learners engaged in the tasks? Do the tasks pose intellectual challenges? Do they involve risk-taking? Do they involve unanticipated, new solutions?
- **cooperation:** do learners work together to solve tasks, setting objectives and planning the work together?
- **reflection:** do the learners evaluate the outcomes and the process together?

• **awareness:** do tasks promote an awareness of the learning processes? Do they give opportunities for identifying strategic options and trying them out?
• **understanding:** to what extent do learning tasks promote a cumulative understanding of the subject matter being studied?
• **continuity:** to what extent do the tasks promote continuity of learning experience? Do they make use of previous learning as a tool of new learnings?

4. Cooperative learning: possibilities and challenges

Cooperative learning, working responsibly together towards group goals, provides important pedagogical ways of promoting learner autonomy. Heterogeneous cooperative learning teams can be a good environment for discussions about learning contents and processes, giving learners opportunities to compare and contrast each others' preferred or habitual ways of learning and to gain a deeper understanding of the processes in so doing.

The work in cooperative learning teams is structured so that there is positive interdependence among the members in the group: the learners feel that they work together for mutual benefit. Positive interdependence needs to be structured carefully in order to encourage all group members to work to their full capacity. In a well-functioning cooperative group there is a sense of joint responsibility where learners care about and get committed to each other's success as well as their own; a sense of "sinking or swimming together". A team environment where learners celebrate each other's successes and provide assistance and help to each other is likely to promote more positive peer relationships, social support, and, partly for that reason, higher self-esteem and academic achievement. Social support is especially beneficial for learning complex materials more thoroughly. The following five principles are necessary for successful cooperative learning (cf. Johnson *et al.* 1990; 1991):

(1) **positive interdependence**, a sense of working together for a common goal and caring about each other's learning;
(2) **individual accountability**, whereby every team member accepts that he is in charge of his own and his teammates' learning and makes an active contribution to the group. Thus there is no "hitchhiking" for anyone in a team; everyone is there pulling his or her own weight;
(3) **promotive face-to face interaction**, where learners explain, argue, elaborate and tie current material with what they have learned previously;

(4) **collaborative skills**, involving an explicit teaching of appropriate leadership, communication, trust and conflict resolution skills so that the team can function effectively;
(5) **group processing**, whereby the teams periodically assess what they have learned, how well they are working together and how they might do better as a learning team.

Cooperative learning teams can provide an effective context for the development of new understandings. Learner talk can be harnessed to the exploration of dawning understandings and new learnings, producing at its best something quite different from traditional classroom discourse. In an affirming and encouraging small group, learners feel free to talk in provisional, exploratory ways. They speak tentatively, trying out their ideas on each other. As there is no need to defend opinions or pretend certainties that are not felt, the mode of learner talk can be one of "perhaps", voicing out uncertainties and trying out rudimentary ideas, as pointed out by Phillida Salmon (1988, 81).

5. Implications for evaluation: towards portfolio assessment

Evaluation can be defined as a systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as participants' attitudes within the context of the particular institution (Brown 1989). For these purposes we need both process-oriented and product-oriented means of evaluation. Process evaluation is an integral part of the learning process, providing information to

- the **teacher** about the progress of individual learners (in terms of the subject matter learning, personal growth, learning skills and collaborative skills), helping him to plan instructional interventions.
- the **learner** about how he is progressing (in terms of both content and process), helping him to take charge of his own learning.

Product evaluation, on the other hand, refers to the summative performance testing, aimed at gauging the learner's knowledge and skills in terms of criterion-referenced descriptions of levels of attainment (for language attainment, cf. Carroll and West 1989). The tests can be administered by the teacher as classroom tests, by educational authorities for purposes of evaluating the curriculum, or for placement or selection purposes. Obviously, both kinds of evaluation are needed for different purposes in the total educational setting. However, it seems that more

professional thinking needs to be devoted to process evaluation since it can have a powerful shaping effect on the ongoing learning process (cf. Kohonen 1989).

It is well-known that anticipation of evaluation procedures has a back-wash effect on learning, both in terms of contents (what to learn) and processes of learning (how to organize knowledge in memory; how to guide student learning). Evaluation can thus affect both the quality and quantity of learning outcomes. Evaluation can be seen as a mirror of the learning goals and objectives, measuring the degree to which they were achieved. It is therefore advisable to keep asking what we are aiming at in school because this also indicates what needs to be evaluated. If we regard self-directed learning as an integral part of the learning outcomes, our evaluation procedures might help the learner to focus on the following aspects of learning that promote such a goal orientation (Kohonen 1992b):

- **self-awareness:** how does the learner feel about himself as a person? To what extent does he feel self-reliant and competent?
- **role:** how does he see his role as a learner? To what extent does he feel in charge of his own learning?
- **monitoring:** to what extent can he monitor his learning, both alone and in small learning teams?
- **self-organization:** to what extent can he organize his knowledge of learning contents and processes?
- **self-assessment:** to what extent can he assess his own learning?

These questions suggest the importance of a reflective process evaluation by the learner himself. Such process evaluation can be carried out well in cooperative learning groups in which learners are asked to reflect on what they have learned, how they have learned, how they have worked together, and how they might improve their work. By learning to capture salient aspects of their own learning, learners can become more informed and thoughtful learners. Reflective self-assessment is thus seen as way to continue developing as a person, as a learner and as a group member.

The learner can organize his achievements, plans, reflections, observations and work samples in what is called a **portfolio**. A portfolio is a purposeful collection of learner work that exhibits his efforts, progress and achievements (cf. Wolf 1989; Paulson *et al.* 1991). In the course of learning the portfolio becomes a kind of autobiography of the learner containing the following kinds of documentation (Kohonen 1991):

- **authentic work samples:** what the learner has actually done, with reflections on the progress evident in the samples

- **learner reflections** on his learning processes (learning diaries)
- **records of achievement** in terms of criterion-based descriptions, including self-assessments of the results of his efforts.

The advantages of portfolio assessment go far beyond evaluating learner performance by product-oriented tests. Portfolio assessment can help learners to:

- diagnose their own learning strengths and weaknesses
- internalize criteria of acceptable performance
- become more independent learners
- see their present stage in relation to the level they wish to attain
- analyze their needs, set aims, define objectives, plan work, find materials and monitor the process
- acquire social and communication skills: negotiating with peers, solving conflicts
- increase their awareness of learning: talking about learning, comparing own understandings and strategies with those of peers, and seeing new perspectives and possibilities to grow as a learner.

Portfolio assessment can also improve the learning atmosphere by introducing a shared management of learning and increasing mutual trust and partnership among learners and teachers. It will increase the learner's involvement, his responsibility of and ownership for his learning. In an important sense, learning remains imperfect until the learner is capable of assessing both what he has learned and how he has done it. Such an awareness is a key for the development of self-directed learning. It can also open an important avenue for enhancing the learner's self-concept and self-esteem as a growing person (cf. Kohonen 1991).

6. Language learning as school development

Teaching content in a foreign language and aiming towards self-directed learning in so doing will necessarily involve a clear change of school culture toward colleagial collaboration of teachers. Professional growth is facilitated in an atmosphere of support and trust whereby teachers see their colleagues as resources for each other. The in-service programs need to extend over several years and involve the whole staff, or at least most of the staff members. Teachers need to work together in colleagial study groups discussing about their educational views, beliefs and values. They need to study educational philosophy and research-based knowledge about teaching and learning. At the same time they observe what they are doing in their classes and collect and analyze site-specific information

in order to see what is actually happening in school. On the basis of their reflections, observations and findings they plan and carry out further instructional measures.

An essential element in colleagial staff development programs is networking teachers, administrators and researchers for mutual benefit, in an atmosphere of learning together. The ultimate aim of such programs is to raise the outcomes of learning in terms of a wide goal orientation of school learning as learner education as discussed in this paper: subject matter knowledge and skills, personal growth, and learning to control the processes of learning, i.e., learning to learn. This goal entails a long-term commitment of the staff to a fundamental restructuring of school as a workplace requiring changes of all parts of the educational system, from learners and teachers to school administration (cf. Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991; Joyce (ed) 1990).

In the light of this discussion, then, developing responsible and autonomous learners is a matter that goes far beyond the traditional language teaching objectives. No single subject alone can do much to promote such a goal within the limited amount of curriculum time per week. Education to enhance the learner as a wholistic person is therefore part of a more general concept of values education in school. Values education is, in any case, an inherent part of any classroom work in any subject where teachers and learners meet each other. This is an ethical question of the respect for the human dignity of all participants in the community. It is a matter of the different teachers committing themselves to work together in order to improve the educational atmosphere of the whole school, working towards a collaborative school community (Kohonen 1993).

It is in such a colleagial school culture of mutual support, risk-taking and exploratory attitudes that the long-term educational outcomes can be developed towards the notion of school learning as learner education, aiming towards facilitating increasingly self-directed learning. University educators can be involved as partners and facilitators in the processes by helping teachers to get access to the necessary knowledge and providing opportunities for continuing in-service education. Involvement in the shared enterprises will also open new interesting research avenues. These ideas, then, pose new challenges on teacher education. In preservice programs teachers need to be initiated to the role of the teacher as an ethical professional. Such contents need to be a central component in the in-service programs for experienced teachers as well, as has been the case in the Jyväskylä Continuing Education Centre's teacher development programme for teaching content through English.

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